

21
A
SERMON
Preach'd at the
FUNERAL
OF

Mr Thomas Pomfret,
Vicar of *Luton* in the County of *Bedford*
AT THE
Parish-Church of *Caddington*, in
the same COUNTY.
UPON THE
Tenth Day of *March*, 1705.

By *A. HUMPHREYS*, Rector of *Barton*
in *Bedfordshire*.

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SERMON

Preached at the

FUNERAL

OF

M. T. J. J. J. J.

Victor, Esq. in the County of Devon

AT THE

Church of St. Andrew

the Parish of



AND THE

Church of St. Andrew

BY A. W. J. J. J. J.

in the County of Devon

Printed at the Press of J. J. J. J.

LONDON

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A S E R M O N, &c.

Revel. 14. 13.

And I heard a voice from Heaven, saying unto me, write, Blessed are the Dead that dye in the Lord from henceforth, yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their Labours, and their works do follow them.

IT is a certain truth, that they, who never think of Dying, are never fit to Dye; and no time can be more seasonable for this Remembrance, then when we are paying the last Office of Love to a Dead Friend; because no Admonitions come so home to us, as they do at such a time; no Religious Thoughts work so seriously upon our Spirits, as those which have a dose of a Death's Head mixt with them.

It was a wretched use, which Heathens made of this Meditation, to whet their sensual Appetites, and to helghten their Luxury by it; and the Son

of *Sirach* doth but expose the sense of worldly
Eccius. 41. Men, when he cryes, *O death, how bitter is the*
 1. *remembrance of thee to him that is at rest, &c.*

But this Remembrance hath really nothing in it, to imbitter the Thoughts of a true Christian, to whom the glories of the World to come are so fully revealed, and by whom the Vanities of this World are so well understood; he looks upon Death, but as a necessary passage from his Labour to his Rest, from his Work to his Wages; because the Voice of God hath reveal'd it, and the Spirit of God hath confirm'd it, that *the dead which dye, &c.*

The Words contain in them,

1. A Doctrine setting forth the Blessed State of those that *dye in the Lord.*

2. The Authority on which the Truth of this Doctrine depends, *a voice from Heaven preacheth it.*

3. The Concerns, that all Posterity have in this Doctrine, therefore it is order'd to be written for our Learning, that the Church may receive comfort from it in all ages, *write*

4. The Agreeableness of this Doctrine to the mind of the Holy Spirit, who guided St. *John's* Pen, that we might see this Voice was no Delusion, *yea, or even so saith the Spirit.*

5. A further Confirmation of all in two reasons, why the Dead are Blessed, *because,*

1. *They rest from their Labours.*

2. *Their works do follow them.*

In the first of these, we have two things to be Explain'd.

1. What it is to *dye in the Lord.*

2. When the Blessedness of such doth begin.

About

About the first of these, I find three different Opinions.

I. The first saith, that *dying in the Lord*, is put for dying for the Lord, as Martyrs do; and Bellarmine, with some more of his Party, restrain the Text to these only, because they would avoid the force of this place, against their Purgatory.

But this interpretation is opposed by a great many Learned Men of the Church of Rome, and it is contrary to the sense of the Ancients, as their own Authors acknowledge. Besides it is a great prejudice to this Opinion, that this Text was very early put into the Solemn Office of Burial, as it is still continued in our Church: Now the Office of Burial was not made only for Martyrs, but for all those that dy'd in the Communion of the Christian Church.

Ribera, Lorinus, Picherellus, Virgassa & multi alii.

And many good Men may be ready to lay down their Lives for Christ, who are not honour'd with Martyrdom; and it would be hard to exclude all these from this Blessedness.

II. The second Opinion is that of the Learned Hugo Grotius, that *dying in the Lord*, signifies, a being under great pressures and continual vexations, for the Truth's sake, as St. Paul said, *that he dyed daily*: but this is too much forc'd; and had the Ancient Fathers understood this place of such a Metaphorical Death, they would not have thought it proper for the comfort of those, who had lost their Dear Friends by a real Death: Neither could they be said to rest from their labours, who were then under the greatest heat and burden of them.

1 Cor. 15: 31

III. The

III. The Third Opinion is the most general as well as the most probable, *viz.* that all They dye in the Lord, who at their Death are living Members of the Lord's Mystical Body his Church, who while they lived, lived unto the Lord, and when they dyed, dyed unto the Lord, *i. e.* who in Death renounce all Confidence in their own Works, and place all their Hope in the Mercy of God and the Merits of Christ. They that are fallen asleep in Christ, and the Dead in Christ, are but other Expressions for the same People, and must be taken in the same Latitude for all the Saints departed.

1 Cor. 15.
18.
1 Thess. 4.
16.

When doth the Blessedness of them that dye, &c. begin? This must be known by the right placing of the Word henceforth.

Some, as *Bellarmino*, begin the Date of this henceforth from the Day of Judgment, as if the Dead in Christ did not till then rest from their Labours; but this shews what hard shift that Party is put to, to maintain their Opinions.

Was this such Encouragement to Martyrdom, such Consolation to the Living, to hear, that after the Day of Judgment their Labour and Sorrow should end? What hard Fate had *Abel* and *Enoch*, *Abraham* and *Isaac* to be so many thousand Years expecting their Ease?

Others render the Greek *αἰῶν* by quickly, presently, and placing it with the Dead would have it to signify, that they who were then dying, or dyed quickly after, were blessed, because they were taken away from the Evil to come by the following Persecutions.

But

But this Opinion labours under several Prejudices, as first, that it is the usual Style of the Holy Spirit to count them happy that endure, rather than those who escape Persecutions. Secondly, It is not easy to be understood, how the good Works of those who dyed before the Persecutions, should be more taken notice of than the works of them who dyed under the Fiery Tryal. Jam. I. 12.
5. 11.

Therefore the Third Opinion seems more reasonable, which dates this Blessedness from the Death of every one who dies in the Lord; and Henceforth is rightly joyned with the word Blessed in our Office of Burial. The true Christian in St. Paul's time, as to this Life, was of all Men most miserable; but as to the next Life he is of all Men most Blessed, because his Warfare is accomplish'd, and all his Dangers are over.

But did not our Blessed Lord say, *Blessed are ye when Men shall revile you and persecute you*: And is not a good Man happy even in the midst of his Sufferings? I answer, he is so in Faith and Hope, and he will be so for ever, if he hold the beginning of his Confidence steadfast unto the end.

But because while we stand in the Battle we may grow weary of our Warfare, while we are on this side the Grave, we may, by backsliding, fall into a worse Pit, that of Apostacy; therefore, whatever others may judge of us, or we of ourselves, yet the Voice from Heaven will not pronounce any Blessed till all Dangers and Temptations are past, none but the Dead that, &c.

2. And this brings me to the second General, viz. The Authority on which the truth of this Doctrine depends, which is Divine, a Voice from Heaven:

Heaven Preacheth it. When the Jews lost the Spirit of Prophecy, as after the Death of *Zachary* and *Malachy*, they had instead of it a Voice from Heaven, and this was continued in the Christian Church, though the Spirit of Prophecy was restored to it, and in a larger effusion than ever, to note the abundance of Revelation, which that time was blessed with; and to signify the uniting of the Jewish and Christian Church into one.

And now what was there so proper to instruct the World, in the state of the dead, as a Voice from Heaven; for with difficulty do we arrive at the knowledge of things before our Eyes, so that we do but betray our Folly, when we pretend to know any thing of the dead, but what Heaven hath revealed to us; and the Folly is as great, when we reject or deny what the most High hath revealed in the written Word. And this brings me to the

3. Third General, viz. *The concern that all Posterity hath in the truth of this Doctrine, since it is ordered to be written for our Learning and Comfort*, write.

Before the Canon of the New Testament was settled, which was not till about 100 Years after the Birth of Christ, Oral Tradition was very necessary to confront the Hereticks that began about that time to appear openly, and to make a separation from the Church; for they also pretended Traditions from some of the Apostles, the falsity of which was then best discovered by the true Traditions of the Apostles; and these might for that Century be safely conveyed by 3 Generations only. But when the Canon of the Scriptures was settled, then Traditions were needless, and were justly

justly rejected if they did not agree with the written Word,, which was then made the Standard of Truth.

And if the good Providence of God had not made this excellent Provision for his Church, there had been need of an infallibility, not only in the Church Universal, but in the Mouth of every one, who related any part of Divine Truth; nothing less could have secured the World from as many different Religions as there were Relations made of God's Will, by Persons the least assuming and vain-glorious.

Blessed be God, who hath taken care, that what is necessary for our Salvation and Comfort should be written. And blessed be his great Name, that this Voice from Heaven is no delusion to us, not like the Heathen Oracles, a crafty Snare to intangle the Worshippers, or a bloody Command to involve the World in Confusion: No, it is the voice of Joy and Health in the Dwellings of the Righteous: It is the Dictate of God's own Spirit, and the Product of his Goodness and Love; which brings me to

4. The Fourth general Head, *viz. The agreeableness of this Doctrine to the Mind of the Holy Spirit, yea, or even so saith the Spirit.*

But what need is there of this Confirmation? Can a Voice from Heaven delude us? I answer, A Voice from the Air may delude us, because Satan is the Prince of the Air, and no doubt is permitted to form Voices in his own Regions as well as in the Bodies of Men possess'd by him; and we may be impos'd upon by what comes from the Air, as if it came from Heaven.

By

2 Pet. i.
21.

By the way then, it is not safe to believe every one who pretends to be honoured, with a Voice from Heaven, many false Prophets are come into the World, who stick not to say, thus saith the Lord, or I heard a Voice from Heaven, when the Lord hath not spoken; but what we have in the written word, we may safely rely on, as the Voice of God, because the Holy Men spoke and writ as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

Besides in the first Preaching of the Gospel, there was in the Church that great gift of discerning of Spirits, whereby all Voices and Revelations were known whence they came; and so what was then agreed upon to be Gods word could be no delusion.

But what need this Doctrine that the dead are Blessed so much Confirmation? is not this the same that *Solon* the *Athenian* told *Cræsus* King of *Lydia*, That no Man is happy before his Death; and if so, then this is the Voice of Nature as well as the Voice of the Spirit. I Answer, what *Solon* said is very different from the Text: for *Solon* meant, that the richest and most prosperous Persons could not be judged happy, unless they ended their Days in the same Prosperity and Ease they lived in; but if they fell from their greatness, as *Cræsus* did, into Misfortunes and a violent Death, they were by him accounted miserable.

But the Voice in the Text doth neither pronounce them happy that live Prosperously, nor them miserable that dye Painfully; but only saith, that good Men, whether they live with little, or with much, whether they dye with Ease or with Agonies, are Blessed after Death; so that where

Solon

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Solan and Nature end their account of Happiness, there Religion and the Spirit begin theirs.

The little happiness, that attends this Life, which poor Mortals so much please themselves with, is so fickle and uncertain, so often interrupted and so easily lost, that to pronounce any happy upon this account were rashness.

But the blessed state of the dead in Christ is so fixt and unalterable, and comes to us so clearly discovered, and so well attested, that to doubt the truth of it were Infidelity.

To prevent which, God is pleased of his gracious condescension to our Infirmities, sometimes to give reasons of his own doings, and of the Faith he requires of us, to draw us with the Cords of a Man, to strengthen the testimony of the Spirit with Arguments suitable to our own understandings, as he doth in the Text, which is the

V. Fifth and last part of it, the reasons given by the Spirit himself, why the dead are Blessed. Which are

1. That they may rest from their labours.

Now the labours that attend us in this Life being so many in number, and so various in form, we must range them into some method to avoid that confusion in our Discourse, which they often cause in our Life.

There are then labours of the Body, of the Mind, and of Religion, and most of these were Exemplified in our deceased Brother.

1. The labours of the Body are many, such as working, weariness, hunger and thirst, Diseases and Pain, and the like; in what multitudes, and with what importunity do these Legions of Infirmities

mities assault our Life, tho' one of them often proves too many for our Health or Patience; what Joy and Ease must it then be to be freed from them all.

Our deceased Brother labour'd under great Pains, very acute Diseases, which seem'd to contend with one another which should have the Mastery over him, and when the lesser Pains did seem to leave him, they were only over-powered by the greater, and yet you could not see his Spirit ruffled, nor his Patience lost, but he endured all with a Manly Courage, and a Christian Resignation to the will of God, he made his Agonies serviceable to wean his Affections from this World, and to provoke his longing after a better; where the weary are at rest.

And he had this benefit also from his Distempers, that he was exercised thereby to bear the second sort of labours, those of the Mind, with the greater Meekness and Patience, which he had a great share off. And which are more dangerous than the former; because they too often corrupt our Religion and hazard our Salvation, by raising the Passions, and provoking to revenge, and want of Charity. Under this head I comprehend all grief and vexation of Spirit, all disturbances that arise from Losses, Disappointments, Affronts and Calumny; all Unquietness occasioned by the Envy, Malice, Fraud, Contempt, and other Oppressions of unreasonable Men; what small Happiness can we pretend to while we are torn by so many Harpies, while the peace of Mind is perpetually gnaw'd and invenom'd with a swarm of such pestilent Insects.

He

He must have a very mortified Spirit, that can undergo all this burden with a calmness and tranquillity of Mind, and that our deceased Brother did so, we have these reasons to believe,

First, That it was his daily practice, according to the Example of his great Master, to pray for those, who added so much to the labours of his Mind, and of this I am very well assured.

Secondly, That when there was occasion to discourse of his greatest Oppressors, I do not remember that he made any reflections upon them that was undecent, much less Unchristian; neither shall I add any more upon this ungrateful subject, but only desire of God that they may have grace to repent, and heartily to ask God forgiveness, and there is need enough of it, yea, tho' they had not pursued him with their last favour of sending him to seek a Grave in another Parish, after he had been Vicar of *Luton* near Fifty Years. Perhaps they desired that he might be an exception to the Text, but that is true notwithstanding, because this was not his own labour but that of his Friends, and how acceptable he was to them, and how much respected and beloved by almost all his Parishoners, appears by this great Concourse, and their affectionate attendance upon his Corps to this Church.

But whatever anxieties may assault the Minds of good Men in this Life, we are assured that they cannot reach them in another Life, nor any way disturb their rest.

Thirdly, There are also labours of Religion, such as attend the narrow way that leads to Life, or such as would turn us out of it.

Of the first sort are Prayers and Tears, Repentance and Alms, keeping a Watch over our Mouth, and all our Life, denying our selves what is pleasant, and chusing what is uneasy, in a word, the labour of universal Obedience; and beside these a Clergy Man is under the labour of constant painful study, and of reading, writing, and Meditation, and when I went to see our Brother here the day before he dyed, I found him reading, tho' his Pain, and the weakness of his Body was so great, so intent he was upon doing good to the Souls of Men.

Of the second sort of labours in Religion, such as would turn us out of the right way, are those which are caused by the deceitfulness of Sin, by the temptations of the Devil, the World, and the Flesh, and these are always wrestling with us, and engage us to put on *the whole Armour of God*, that we may be able to subdue a rebellious heart, and mortify corrupt desires and inclinations.

But all these labours end in Death, and give way to what is more perfect, easy and glorious. For

2. Their Works do follow them, which signifies that their labour is not in vain, but follows to receive an Immortal recompence, to be a lasting satisfaction to their Mind, and the glorious Crown of their Victory; they follow not to disturb their rest, but to adorn it.

And blessed are those Servants of God, who by patient continuance in well doing, have raised such Prophecies of their Spiritual Victory, who have embellish'd their Conversation with such Jewels of Faith and Vertue, as are in the sight of God of
great

great price. And that we may reckon our de-
ceas'd Brother in the number of such, will appear
reasonable from the following account.

1. His temper and disposition was a good founda-
tion to build a holy Religion upon, his Chil-
dren received the Comfort of his tender Care
and Provision, though to his own hindrance; his
Friends and Neighbours found him always affa-
ble and courteous, the Poor were refreshed with
his Bounty, and the Rich with his Council and
Advice; and few tasted the sweetness of his Con-
versation, but desired the continuance of it.

2. His ability for his Calling, and his diligence
in it, was very remarkable, his Parts both natu-
ral and acquired, had made him a sound Divine
and an able Disputant; his labours in the Pulpit
discovered him to be a Workman that needed not
to be ashamed, and his dispute with the Anabap-
tists in his own Parish, shewed how capable he
was to manage Controversies in Divinity. Nor
did his diligence in the Sacred Function come
short of his Ability, as appears from his constant
Preaching, Catechising, and other ways of In-
struction, from his indefatigable studies, and his
other attendance upon the Ministry and Cure of
Souls; so that he was a very hard Master to his
crazy Body, rather than his Parishoners should
want their Spiritual Food.

3. If you look into his Life and Conversation
as a Christian, I believe the blemishes of it will
appear to be very few, of which I think this is no
small evidence, that the very Dissenters had so
much respect for him, that they seemed to resent
his late hard usage more than himself. And if I
am

am not wrong informed, offered to bear a share in the charges of it.

Another proof of the regularity of his Life may be this, that when a diligent Inquisition was made into it, there was hardly blemish enough found to ground a Libel upon, and that was no moral failure neither.

And for the time that I have been acquainted with him, which is near Thirty Years, I have not seen or heard any thing of him but what was Grave, Honest and Temperate.

Now this Godly Conversation is the greatest Ornament of Mans Life, that which sets a lustre upon all other good qualities, without which our very Faith is deficient and vain.

Dan. 12.
last.

Since then our deceased Brother was so eminent in all these Endowments, let us not fear to number him among the Blessed, who dy in the Lord; and we will now dismiss him with the saying of the Angel to the Prophet Daniel, *Cap. ult. v. last. Go thou thy way till the end be, for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days.*

And let us now from the good Example which he hath given us, and from the words of the Text make these following Observations.

Matth. 10.
42.

1. What a mighty encouragement it is to our chearful Progress in all the labours of Religion to know and be assured, that God takes an account of them all, and will not forget this our work of love, nay will not suffer a Cup of cold Water, given for his sake, to go unrewarded.

Mark 14.
9.

How did the precious Oyntment, that Mary bestowed on our Saviours Head, embalm her own Name and Memory to all Posterity?

We

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We may do the same thing, for we have the Poor always with us to do it by, and our great Master counts himself relieved, when they are, ^{Matt. 25.} and himself persecuted, when they are injured. ^{40. Acts 9. 5.}

2. Behold what reason we have to be valiant for the Truth, and to bear patiently all the affronts and hardships we meet with in the Exercise of a holy Religion; our Day of rest is coming, and in the mean time these light afflictions are working for us a far more exceeding and Eternal weight of Glory.

3. Behold here the unreasonableness of being afraid of Death, which to a true Christian is but the beginning of an undisturb'd Happiness.

Indeed a Person that neither lives nor dies to God, hath reason enough to be afraid of dying, because then all his hopes perish; but he that dies in the Lord, in his favour and acceptance, is then going to his rest; is in the *Stoicks* Language, freed from his Imprisonment, or in the Language of the Spirit, then all his Labours and Vexations are ended.

4. Let us all learn from hence the great advantage as well as necessity of a holy Life; you see that they who dye well are Blessed, and there is no sure and regular way of coming to dye well, but by living so. A Death-Bed Repentance, as it is very difficult and full of hazard, so it is always irregular; it is but a Plank laid hold of after a Shipwrack, which was never a safe way of making Port.

But a holy and Christian Life conducts our Vessel secure among Rocks and Shelves, and cannot fail of a Haven of rest; Storms may arise,

and Floods may lift up their Voice, but the good Man goes on *Mediis tutissimus undis*, safe and undisturb'd in all dangers, which dangers may be means of raising his reputation and glory, but cannot deprive him of his Rest and Crown.

Men are naturally desirous to Eternize their Memories, that their Names may endure throughout all Generations, and to this end multiply Estates and Children, and call their Lands after their own Names; but after all this contrivance fails and falls short of its end; for there is but one way of making our Names to endure for ever, and that is, by a holy Faith and a Christian Life; this, the longer it lasts the more precious it is, whereas the richest Jewels, do in time, lose their Value, and their Fashion.

Great hath been the strife and contention among Heathens for Crowns and Garlands that fade and wither in a day; but they are wise who strive to exceed others in Vertue and Religion; because this will give us Comfort in this Life, and will hereafter bring us through the Mercy of God, to an Inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, that fadeth not away, &c.

To which God, &c.

F I N I S.